

# Abandoning Oregon's Most Vulnerable Kids

## Impact on Crime of Proposed Federal Withdrawal Of Foster Care Funding Pledge



**A Report from FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS OREGON**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **Executive Summary**

In 2003, 5,158 children in Oregon were abused or neglected so severely that they had to be removed from their homes. As 2003 ended, there were more than 9,000 children living in foster homes in Oregon. A major reason why Oregon needs a significant number of foster homes is that the state treats more people for methamphetamine addiction per capita than any other state in the country. Law enforcement leaders and crime victims know that safe foster homes and services are essential if abused or neglected children are to heal and grow up to be productive citizens. Safe foster homes are also necessary to protect others in Oregon from future crime, because research shows that almost four out of 10 of the children who are re-abused or neglected rather than put in safe foster homes will become violent criminals.

For over 25 years, the nation has maintained a commitment of assistance for each eligible abused or neglected child who needs a safe foster home. When the number of children needing foster homes increases, the federal government promises it will match the states' help for each eligible child. Now, that commitment may be abandoned, substituted with federal payments to states that would have rigid limits. This new "cap" is proposed as an option to states in the President's budget and is mandatory for all states in legislation to be re-introduced by U.S. House Ways and Means Subcommittee Chairman Representative Wally Herger (R-Calif.).

Unlike current law's commitment to match state payments for each eligible child who needs foster care, the new state cap would not budge even when child abuse caseloads surge. More than three-quarters of the states had an increase in demand for foster care in at least one of the four years from 1999 to 2003, and six states, including New Jersey and Texas, had at least a third more children in foster care at the end of the four years. Oregon has seen the number of kids in foster care increase in both 2002 and 2003. The most recent increase, from 2002 to 2003, was over 3 percent.

The spreading national methamphetamine epidemic and improved state efforts to identify more children who are being abused or neglected are likely to increase the need for foster care in Oregon and many other states during the next several years.

To make matters worse, Representative Herger's proposal would actually cut funding in real (inflation-adjusted) dollars after the first year, putting the squeeze on foster care even in years when caseloads do not rise.

When the number of children in need of foster care exceeds the capped funding, caseworkers will find themselves between a rock and a hard place, struggling with the question: "When no safe foster home is available due to lack of funding, how high does the risk of further abuse or neglect have to be before I remove a child from a home?" The likely result: more abused and neglected children will be left in homes where they have already been beaten, sexually abused, or

severely neglected. Equally troubling, the children who are removed from their homes are more likely to wind up in overcrowded or unsafe foster homes instead of the nurturing homes they so badly need if they are to heal and go on to lead healthy, productive lives.

Abused and neglected children who are re-abused because of the shortage of foster care, or who are placed in inadequate or unsafe foster care, will pay an enormous price, day after day for the rest of their lives. However, they will not be the only victims of the proposed neglect of the foster care system. Others will also pay the price. Law enforcement and crime victims know that failing to protect and heal abused and neglected children sentences Oregon families to needless crime and violence. For example, research shows that when seriously abused or neglected children are left in dangerous homes and have to be placed in foster care later due to more abuse or neglect, they are 27 percent more likely to grow up to be violent criminals than kids immediately placed in foster care.

The 101 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, and victims of violence who are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS OREGON, and the more than 2,000 members nationally, are committed to protecting the children who cannot protect themselves. Our members are also committed to protecting our communities from future crime. Placing an arbitrary, rigid limit on federal foster care support for abused and neglected children is a dangerous abandonment of the commitment our country makes to our most vulnerable children.

# Eliminating the National Commitment to Help Abused and Neglected Children Will Increase Crime in Oregon

Most people in Oregon are aware of the severe abuse and neglect some children suffer. Few people, however, realize the scope of the problem or the severity of the consequences. According to Oregon's Department of Human Services, there were 9,477 officially confirmed victims of child abuse or neglect in 2003, up 15 percent from 2001.<sup>1</sup> That equals one in every 100 Oregon children.<sup>2</sup> In 2003, 5,158 children were removed from their homes and placed in foster care;<sup>3</sup> in 2003, 14 children died from abuse or neglect in Oregon.<sup>4</sup>

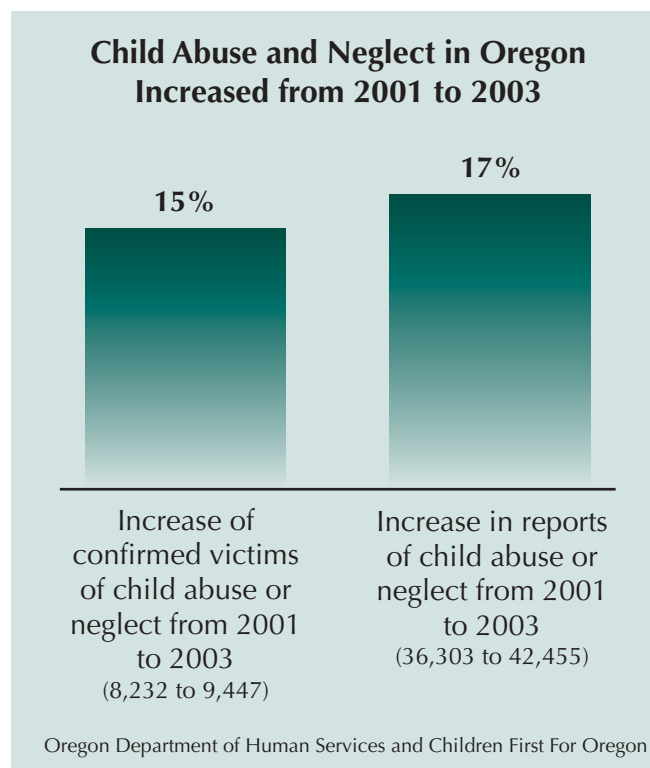
## I. Continued abuse or neglect creates violent criminals

The tragedy does not end once the abuse and neglect takes place. Though many abused and neglected children grow up to lead productive lives, children who live through abuse or neglect are far more likely than other children to be unemployed and to suffer from unstable relationships when they grow up.<sup>5</sup> They are also two and a half times more likely than other children and adults to attempt suicide, and more likely than other children to become criminals who prey on others.<sup>6</sup> A year's toll of abuse and neglect reaches well into the future, and well beyond the initial victims.

## The link between abuse and neglect and future crime

Severe abuse and neglect, particularly when it occurs during the earliest months and years of life, can permanently injure children in ways

that make them much more susceptible to engaging in violence. According to Dr. Bruce Perry, a neurobiologist and authority on brain development and children in crisis: "The systems in the human brain that allow us to form and maintain emotional relationships develop during infancy and the first years of life. ... with severe emotional neglect in early childhood the impact can be devastating."<sup>7</sup> Dr. Perry explains that severely neglected children frequently respond with aggression and cruelty that "is often accompanied by a detached, cold lack of empathy."<sup>8</sup> Research shows that neglect



is as likely as physical abuse to lead to future criminal behavior when a child reaches adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

Physical abuse can cause post-traumatic stress disorders in children. Abused children's brains can become "stuck" in high alert with very high resting heart rates and high levels of stress hormones in their blood even when nothing is threatening them. These children are predisposed to interpret others' actions as threatening, and are quick to respond impulsively and aggressively in their own defense.<sup>10</sup> Perry warns: "The most dangerous children are created by a malignant combination of experiences. Developmental neglect and traumatic stress during childhood create violent, remorseless children."<sup>11</sup>

### **Children who are severely and continually abused or neglected are most likely to become violent criminals**

Although surveys report varying numbers, it is clear that a high percentage of criminals were abused or neglected as children. One review of the literature on prior abuse and neglect concluded that approximately half of the youths arrested for delinquency had been abused or neglected earlier in their lives.<sup>12</sup>

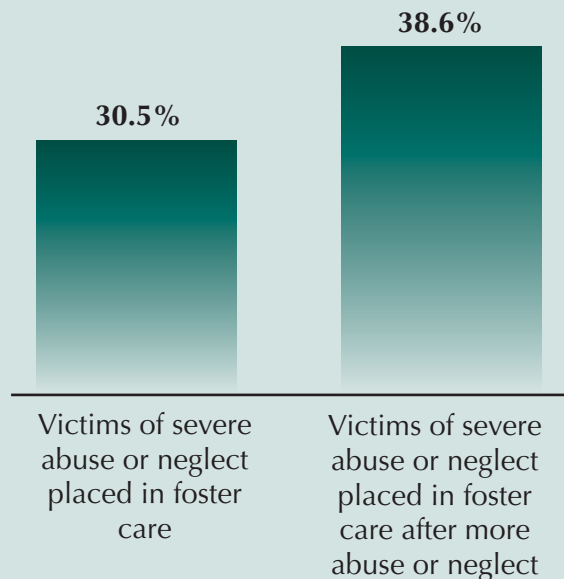
New Jersey Medical School psychologist Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom located individuals who had been abused or neglected as children and compared them to otherwise similar individuals who had no official record of abuse or neglect. By studying the subsequent arrest records and controlling for other demographic risk factors, Dr. Widom found that being abused or neglected almost doubles the odds that a child will commit a crime as a juvenile.<sup>13</sup>

**"Developmental neglect and traumatic stress during childhood create violent, remorseless children."**

Dr. Bruce Perry

### **Continued Abuse Creates Violent Criminals**

Seriously abused or neglected children left in dangerous homes, who have to be placed in foster care after being re-abused or neglected, are **27%** more likely to become violent criminals than children placed directly in foster care.



English, Widom, and Brandford

The more severe the abuse or neglect and the longer it takes place, the more likely children are to become violent criminals. A recent study conducted in Washington State by Dr. Diana English, Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom, and Carol Brandford looked at children whose abuse or neglect was serious enough that the state legally took over temporary custody of the children from their parents and placed the children directly into foster care. Fully three out of 10 of these children (30.5 percent) were later arrested as juveniles or as adults for at least one violent crime.

The researchers also studied children who had been seriously abused or neglected and were temporarily removed from the legal custody of their parents, but who were not placed directly into foster care. The children who were made wards of the court, but were left in their homes and abused or neglected again, resulting in subsequent foster care placements, were even more likely to grow up to become violent criminals than the children who were immediately placed in foster care.



Almost four out of 10 of these re-abused or neglected children (38.6 percent) became violent criminals.<sup>14</sup> The study is a warning that leaving abused or neglected children in dangerous homes – a far more likely occurrence when adequate numbers of safe foster homes are unavailable – further increases by 27 percent the risk that the children will become violent criminals.

## **II. Rigid caps on foster care would leave children in dangerous homes**

Eliminating the nation's current commitment to help each eligible abused and neglected child, and substituting it with a rigid capped payment to states, would leave many states with a shortfall in funding for foster homes for victims of abuse or neglect.

The numbers of abused or neglected children are likely to increase beyond an inflexible capped federal payment in many states for multiple reasons. Many states, including Oregon, are already facing growing epidemics of methamphetamine use that will inevitably lead to more victims of abuse or neglect. Additionally, states are improving their systems in ways that will increase the number of children identified as needing foster care. If state foster care payments are capped, there would be less funding and that would lead to two possible outcomes. Quality and safety problems with foster homes would increase, endangering the children who are placed in foster care; or many more children who are known to be at high risk of further abuse and neglect would be left in dangerous homes instead of placed in safe foster homes.

### **The capped foster care payment would decline over time placing more children at risk**

The proposed capped payment to states in the legislation by Representative Herger only matches the inflation rate the first year and in real, inflation adjusted numbers, is set to decline in subsequent years.<sup>15</sup> Representative Herger recently acknowledged that when the

legislation is re-introduced this year the funding amounts he proposed last year may be cut even further due to budget constraints.<sup>16</sup>

To make matters worse, capped block grants historically are cut over time. According to the Urban Institute:

The real value of block grant funding tends to diminish over time. A study of five ... block grants [from 1986 to 1995] found that the real value of four of them decreased. ... A more recent analysis of 11 block grants found that from their establishment to the present, real federal funding fell by an average of 11 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, even if caseloads stay at current levels, states may soon have insufficient funds to help all of their abused and neglected children. The quality and safety of foster care placements would be jeopardized by lower funding, which would cause qualified foster parents to leave the system, to be replaced, if they are replaced at all, by less qualified foster parents. The lack of high-quality foster care parents or the simple lack of foster homes would mean that many children would face being left in dangerous homes.

Nationally, there was a slight decline overall in foster care caseloads in the last four years for which data are available (1999 to 2003).<sup>18</sup> However, if Representative Herger's proposal had been put in place sometime between the years 1999 and 2003, most states would have faced shortfalls in federal funding:

- More than three-quarters of the states had an increase in demand for foster care in at least one of the four years from 1999 to 2003.<sup>19</sup>
- A quarter of the states had increases of over 10 percent in at least one of the four years.<sup>20</sup>
- Six states, including New Jersey and Texas, had caseloads that were at least a third larger in 2003 than they were in 1999.<sup>21</sup>

From 2001 to 2002, Oregon's foster care caseload increased 1.5 percent, and then from 2002 to 2003 the need for foster homes increased an additional 3 percent.<sup>22</sup> As already noted, the number of victims of abuse or neglect increased 15 percent from 2001 to 2003.<sup>23</sup> If in coming years, for any number of reasons, the need for foster home placements increases again in Oregon, or even stays the same, under the Herger proposal federal funding for foster homes would not keep pace and there would not be enough safe homes for the children who need them.

### **The growing methamphetamine epidemic is increasing the need for foster homes**

The need for foster homes is heavily influenced by epidemics of drug abuse. The crack epidemic in America produced a rising wave of abuse and neglect as addicted parents fed their drug habits while neglecting or abusing their children. According to a U.S. Government Accounting Office study of New York City, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, "The percentage of young foster children estimated to have been prenatally exposed to cocaine increased significantly, from 17 percent in 1986 to 55 percent in 1991."<sup>24</sup>

Oregon experienced its own crisis then. According to a study conducted during that period by Portland State University:

Oregon's child welfare agency is serving a dramatically increasing percentage of severely abused children. The percentage of children in foster care who have suffered from severe physical abuse rose by 86% and those who have suffered from severe sexual abuse rose by 150% between 1987-1990 and 1991-1993. ... The increase in severe abuse/neglect and the severity of children's problems contribute to a growth in the average daily population of children in foster care, the increasing difficulty in finding suitable foster homes and in maintaining the child in care.<sup>25</sup>

More recently, methamphetamine has been

fueling abuse and neglect throughout Oregon. Much of the attention has been focused on children who live in houses where methamphetamine is being produced.

In a January 27th, 2005 article titled "Methamphetamine scourge sweeps rural America," the Reuters news agency reported, "In thousands of cases, people have been caught cooking the highly toxic chemicals in homes where children were present, breathing the poisonous fumes."<sup>26</sup> National Public Radio reported in a story on "Meth Orphans" that when children are removed from these homes they "are scrubbed down and changed into clean clothes. They take nothing with them, no books, no stuffed animals, because everything is contaminated."<sup>27</sup>

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reported in its 2005 Oregon fact sheet that Oregon "has a growing number of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories."<sup>28</sup> In a series of articles in *The Oregonian*, Steve Suo wrote that local small-time producers are not responsible for the bulk of methamphetamine production. Large-scale labs in California and Mexico are responsible for the majority of methamphetamine that is reaching the streets of big cities and small towns throughout the country. The DEA reports that in Oregon methamphetamine from these large labs "continues to flood the market." Unfortunately, Suo reports that currently "the most recent statistics on meth use show the number of addicts is rising, along with drug purity, suggesting the traffickers have found other overseas sources of supply" for the raw materials used to make methamphetamine.<sup>29</sup>

No state may be harder hit by this epidemic than Oregon. Suo's analysis of state drug treatment data showed that Oregon "treats more people for meth addiction per capita than any other state in the country."<sup>30</sup>

Methamphetamine is highly addictive. The National Institutes of Health reports that "Immediately after smoking or intravenous injection, the methamphetamine user



experiences an intense sensation, called a 'rush' or 'flash,' that lasts only a few minutes and is described as extremely pleasurable. Users may become addicted quickly, and use it with increasing frequency and in increasing doses."<sup>31</sup> Parents are exposing children to the drugs if they smoke the methamphetamine; they are also exposing their children to the poverty, conflicts and crime that so often engulf the lives of addicts. Far too often parents simply walk away and leave their children.

Ramona Foley, assistant director for Children, Adults and Families at Oregon's Department of Human Services (DHS), said, "I think if we had some miracle cure, and we no longer had to deal with meth, it would likely reduce the [abuse and neglect] caseloads by at least half."<sup>32</sup> Counties throughout Oregon are overwhelmed. Gary Weeks, director of DHS said, "One reason foster families are getting larger is to absorb the growing number of endangered children, many of them the sons and daughters of meth addicts or alcoholics and many of them facing their own medical or psychiatric problems as a result."<sup>33</sup>

As the system goes beyond capacity, children are being placed in more risky homes. Two recent tragic cases in Clackamas County illustrate this point: one was a 5-year old child

who was found bruised and emaciated in an overcrowded and inadequately monitored foster home, and another was a toddler who died of head wounds after the state reunited him with his parents. Both children originally came into the system from homes affected by meth.<sup>34</sup>

If federal funding for foster care is capped, instead of growing to meet the need when drug epidemics hit the state, funding for foster care would erode over time with disastrous results.

### **Additional factors likely to increase the need for foster homes:**

#### **1. Improving efforts to identify abused and neglected children**

The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, a congressionally mandated study undertaken by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, concluded that the true number of children abused or neglected nationally each year is three times the officially recognized number.<sup>35</sup>

Children First for Oregon, citing the latest data available from the state, released a report in January of 2005 stating:

- Between 1994 and 2003, reports of

### **The Walk Away Drug:**

Before she left, 18-year-old Samantha Zeller stole across the silence of a suburban home and taped a note to her mother's bedroom door.

"I love you, don't worry," she wrote. When Rhonda Zeller awoke, she found her daughter had left something else behind: her 1-year-old son. Samantha reappeared the day he turned 2, only to walk out again while the birthday boy cried for his mother to stay. Each time she left, he would stand at the door screaming, "Mommy, no, don't go, please don't go." She would go anyway. "That's when I knew how horrible this drug must be," Rhonda said. "She loved him more than life."

The drug was methamphetamine. Judges and child-protection workers call it the scourge of parenthood. They label it the "walk away" drug, because that's what parents do.

David Olinger, December 28, 2004,  
Meth Crisis Soars in Colorado: Addicted parents neglect or abandon kids, The Denver Post

child abuse or neglect increased by 61 percent.

- From just 2001 to 2003, reports of child abuse or neglect are up 17 percent and confirmed cases of abuse or neglect are up 15 percent.
- In 2003, almost half (48 percent) of the reports of children being harmed or at a substantial risk of being harmed received further investigation after the initial intake. The percentage of reports investigated also varied widely by county.<sup>36</sup>

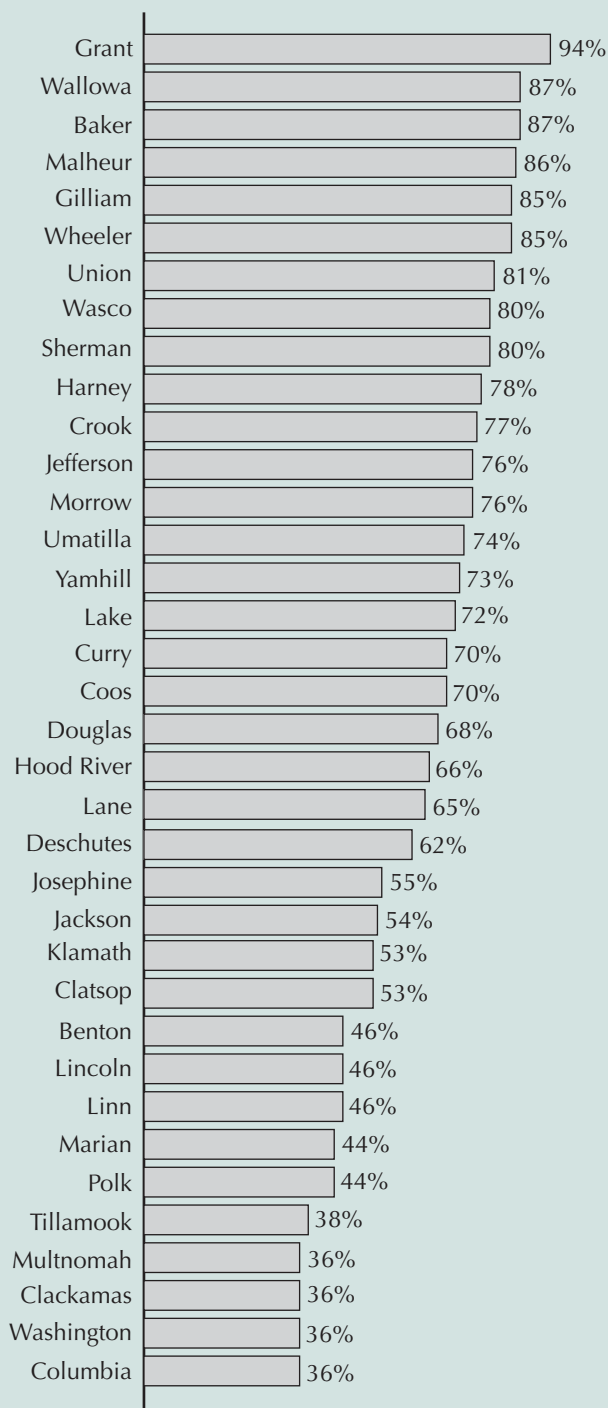
As Oregon improves its ability to fully and more accurately investigate reported cases of abuse or neglect, and increases abuse and neglect education and awareness outreach efforts to doctors, nurses, law enforcement officers, teachers, child care providers, and the general public, more cases of abuse or neglect will be identified. Increases in discovered cases of abuse or neglect would result in the need for more foster homes.

## 2. Determining that more foster homes are needed to reduce re-abuse or neglect

In 2003, 9,447 Oregon children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect.<sup>37</sup> The public may typically be unaware that about half of abused or neglected children in Oregon stay with their families.<sup>38</sup>

Some people assume that foster homes are more dangerous than the homes from which children were removed. Except in a few, highly publicized incidents, that is not the case. A federal Child and Family Services Review of Oregon's child welfare system completed in 2001, reported that 6.8 percent of all victims of abuse and neglect in Oregon were re-abused or neglected within six months – typically by the people who originally abused or neglected them. That compares with a rate of abuse or neglect by foster parents over a whole year of three-quarters of one percent (0.8 percent). The abuse rate in foster homes is thus about one-tenth the rate of re-abuse and neglect for all

**Percentage of Reports of Abuse or Neglect Where Interviews and/or Physical Exams Were Conducted in Each County in 2003**



Oregon Department of Human Services and Children First For Oregon

victims of abuse and neglect in Oregon.<sup>39</sup>

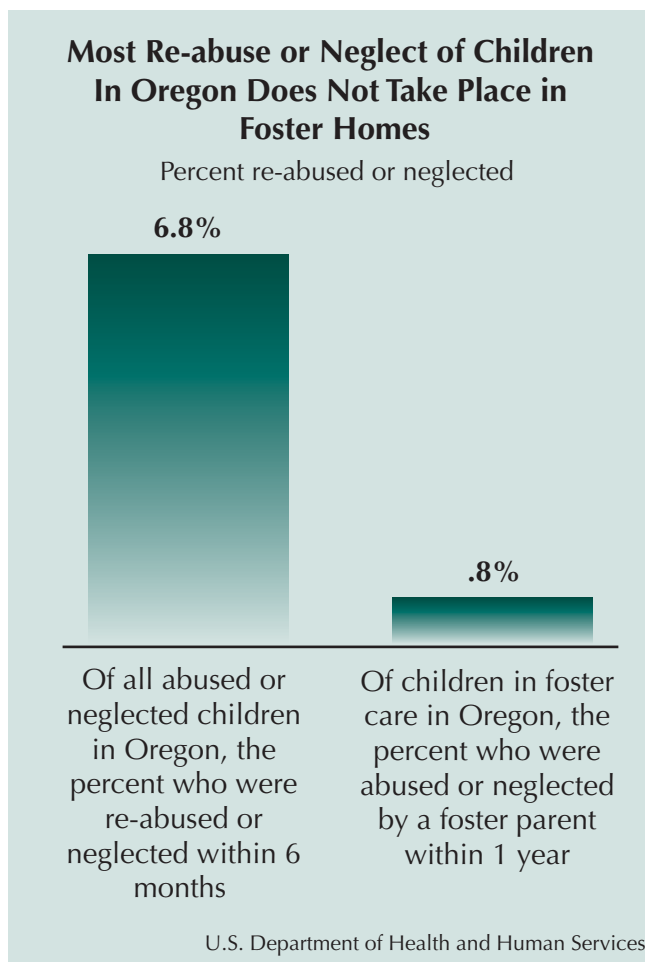
The review noted that in two of the three counties where site reviews were conducted,

shortages of foster homes were reported. Additionally, the rate at which children have to be returned to foster care, because of continuing abuse or neglect after having returned to their families, was reported at 20 percent – more than twice the national standard.<sup>40</sup> That high re-entry rate may indicate that children are sometimes sent back home too soon in order to free up scarce foster care beds for new victims. Addressing the shortage of foster homes in various localities may help Oregon reduce the number of children who are re-victimized.

### 3. Conducting better outreach to homeless youth

Improved efforts to help homeless youth would increase the need for foster homes. The Citizen's Crime Commission of Portland recently released a report decrying the treatment of the large number of homeless youth in Portland and throughout the state. The report noted that there are an estimated 11,781 incidences of runaways statewide in 2003. Many youth find their way to Portland or other cities in Oregon where they congregate at downtown locations such as Pioneer Square in Portland. The Commission report noted that "The 'street' lifestyle is harmful to the physical and emotional health of our youth and ... the existence of homeless teens is unhealthy for the community, in that it breeds illicit activity and crime, intimidates law-abiding citizens, and is destructive to the livability of the community."<sup>41</sup> The National Network for Youth reports that many homeless youth are fleeing abusive homes and that "across studies of homeless youth, rates of sexual abuse range from 17 to 53 percent, and physical abuse range from 40 to 60 percent."<sup>42</sup>

The Portland commission was particularly critical of the Department of Human Services (DHS) for not providing adequate foster care services to help homeless youth. The report noted that many homeless youths are aging out of foster care without adequate transition services to avoid becoming homeless. Other youth are fleeing foster care or have had their



cases closed too soon, and still need services. Additional homeless youths would be eligible for foster care because of their histories of severe abuse or neglect but have not yet come to the attention of the child welfare system. The report stated that:

Homeless-agency workers often had to argue with DHS staff, who either refused or were unable to find placements for foster children when they showed up at the 24-hour Access and Reception Center, which assesses the needs of the 1,300 wayward youth brought there each year. ... Child Welfare is aware that it has a dearth of foster beds for teens.<sup>43</sup>

Citizen's Crime Commission Co-Chair James Jeddeloh, President of Perkins & Company, stated, "It's a shameful thing. Washing your hands and closing the case file of a 15-year-old foster kid is continuing the pattern of abuse to that child. Somebody's got to take

responsibility and, at this point, the state needs to step up and do it.”<sup>44</sup>

Ramona Foley, DHS assistant director for Children, Adults and Families, acknowledged in *The Oregonian* that more needs to be done for these homeless youths.<sup>45</sup> Doing so, however, would undoubtedly increase the need for more foster homes in Portland and throughout the state.

### **Capping foster care could increase the number of youths on the streets**

Instead of promoting better care for homeless youth, a capped foster care payment could lead to more children running away from home. Older children will respond to being sent back to abusive or neglectful homes by simply running away. More children escaping harm on their own will further strain the overburdened services for runaway youth, as these abused or neglected children find their way to Oregon’s streets. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that, “Because of their age, homeless youth have few legal means by which they can earn enough money to meet basic needs. Many homeless adolescents find that exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter is their only chance of survival on the streets. ... It has been reported that the HIV prevalence for homeless youth may be as much as 2 to 10 times higher than the rates reported for other samples of adolescents in the United States.”<sup>46</sup>

### **III. Capping foster care in exchange for more state flexibility would not prevent abuse or neglect from happening in the first place and risks returning children to their abusers**

Evidence shows that the intense need to meet the emergencies of abused and neglected children swamps prevention efforts. There are programs that are effective at preventing child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, but their success can only be assured with separate, dedicated funding. Without

dedicated funding, both efforts to protect children are undermined:

- Abandoning the commitment to children would leave states with not enough or dangerously inadequate foster homes when demand for foster homes rises, leading to higher rates of re-abuse and neglect.
- Not ensuring prevention funding will do nothing to stem the flow of new children into the system.

### **Prevention could work**

Research has shown that in-home parent coaching for at-risk parents before and after the birth of their first child can significantly reduce abuse and neglect. The Nurse Family Partnership program in Elmira, NY randomly assigned at-risk pregnant women to receive in-home visits by nurses or to be in a control group. The nurses coach the expectant mothers in parenting and other skills, continuing until their child is age 2. Children whose mothers were left out of the program were five times more likely to be abused or neglected than children whose mothers received parent coaching. Children of mothers left out had twice as many arrests by age 15 as the children of mothers who received home visits.<sup>47</sup> When this program was later replicated in Memphis, eight of the 465 children in the study whose parents did not receive in-home parent coaching had fractures and/or head trauma requiring hospitalizations, while none of the 206 children whose parents received the program were hospitalized for such injuries.<sup>48</sup> An additional replication underway in Denver has also produced strong results.<sup>49</sup>

There is no question that it is possible to reduce abuse and neglect. Oregon has a Nurse Family Partnership program in Multnomah County and has already set up in-home parent coaching programs around the state utilizing the widely-replicated Healthy Start model.<sup>50</sup> To fully realize the potential of the parent coaching approach, however, the available research shows that much more needs to be



done in Oregon to ensure that all those who need the services are receiving them and that the quality of the programs continues to improve. For example, it is important to continue striving to ensure that, whenever possible, all new parents are enrolled in the program before the birth of their child, and to ensure that every parent coach is highly trained at identifying and helping parents with the problems that are most likely to lead to the abuse or neglect of their children.<sup>51</sup>

### **Current proposals are unlikely to lead to meaningful declines in abuse and neglect**

Unfortunately, under Representative Herger's proposal, large increases in funding to prevent child abuse in the first place ("primary prevention") are unlikely because the day-to-day responsibilities of child protection agencies would not change. Child welfare agencies in Oregon and across the United States are obligated to provide services, monitoring, and care to the children who are already harmed. States need additional money for primary prevention to stop abuse and neglect from happening in the first place, because they will not be able to redirect significant amounts of funding from children already abused or neglected. A study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirmed that unless federal funding is specifically directed at primary prevention efforts, it goes overwhelmingly for those who are already victims of abuse and neglect.<sup>52</sup>

Oregon is now facing financial pressure to cut the state's own commitment to in-home parent coaching of at-risk parents. Without a more concerted effort to directly fund primary prevention efforts, the goal of reducing abuse and neglect is unlikely to be realized under the current proposals.

Improvements in assessing the needs of children who are already abused and neglected and providing them and their caregivers with necessary services are wise investments.<sup>53</sup> Those changes are needed to help the children heal, to prevent more re-abuse and neglect,

and to prevent the harm that has already been done from spreading to the broader community through increased crime and violence. However, since the number of children abused or neglected again is a relatively small portion of all the cases of abuse and neglect that take place each year, improving the treatment of those already abused and neglected will not lead to large declines in overall abuse and neglect. The treatment of already abused and neglected children must not come at the cost of abandoning the commitment to children by capping foster care funding. It is unacceptable to leave children in dangerous homes when the need for foster care increases. Capping foster care funding cannot be considered a responsible option.

### **IV. Conclusion: Abandoning the national commitment to provide abused or neglected children with safe foster homes would increase violent crime**

Abandoning the national foster care commitment to Oregon's abused and neglected children threatens that there will not be enough safe foster homes when these children need them. If the support for children needing foster care is capped, when demand for foster homes goes up either the quality and safety of foster homes will be jeopardized, or more children will be returned to dangerous homes. Research shows that returning severely abused or neglected children to unsafe homes can lead to 27 percent more of the children becoming violent criminals if they later have to be placed in foster care. This is not just a tragedy for the abused and neglected children; it places our communities at increased risk from violent crime. The law enforcement leaders and crime victims who make up FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS OREGON cannot support such a risky abandonment of our long-standing national commitment to abused and neglected children.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Children First for Oregon. (n.d.). *The status of Oregon's children*. Retrieved from <http://www.cffo.org>
- <sup>2</sup> Children First for Oregon. (n.d.). *The status of Oregon's children*. Retrieved from <http://www.cffo.org>
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. Children's Bureau. (2004, August). *Foster Care FY1999 - FY2003 entries, exits, and numbers of children in care on the last day of each federal fiscal year*. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/tables/index.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> Children First for Oregon. (n.d.). *The status of Oregon's children*. Retrieved from <http://www.cffo.org>
- <sup>5</sup> Widom, C. S. (2000). *Childhood victimization: Early adversity, later psychopathology*. Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web site: [www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/jr000242b.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/jr000242b.pdf). Individuals not abused or neglected as children were 40 percent more likely to be employed, and 50 percent more likely to have stable marriages.
- <sup>6</sup> Widom, C. S. (2000). *Childhood victimization: Early adversity, later psychopathology*. Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web site: [www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/jr000242b.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/jr000242b.pdf).
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- <sup>20</sup> This figure in this bullet did not include states with over 20% increases in caseloads for any year because the Herger bill is expected to allow states to be reimbursed if their caseloads grow above 20% in one year.
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<sup>53</sup> The experiment with a waiver in Oregon showed that it is possible to make important changes in the child welfare system that can likely lead to less disruption in children's lives – though continuing study is needed to confirm these changes can be done safely and cost-effectively. But that does not remove the concern that in Oregon and around the country, capping foster care is an unwise, and unnecessary move. If changes in how children are served lead to no need for increased funding for foster care placements or even in eventual reductions in the need for funding, that is welcome news. But if conditions suddenly change – due to drug epidemics or other unpredictable causes – and the need for foster care homes goes up, as has repeatedly happened in the past, children should simply never be told there is not enough money to pay for a safe home for them. It is and will continue to be unacceptable to have to return children to the people who severely beat, starved or raped them. See: Lehman, C., Liang, S., O'Dell, K., Duryea, M. (2003, March). *Evaluation of Oregon's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project*. Child Welfare Partnership. Portland University: Portland, OR.

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